

The BLACK C o M M e n t a t o r

An independent weekly internet magazine
dedicated to the movement for economic justice,
social justice and peace - Providing commentary,
analysis and investigations on issues affecting
African Americans and the African world.

www.BlackCommentator.com

June 21, 2012 - Issue 477

Southern Baptist Convention Elects its First African American President Will He Push an Anti-Gay Agenda? Inclusion By The Reverend Irene Monroe BC Editorial Board

African American voters are President Obama's largest and most steadfast supporters. They are also one of the largest and most steadfast opponents of marriage equality. So, when President Obama finally made public his support of same- sex marriage, one group wondering how they might parlay their support against him with African American voters are white Southern Baptists - a huge denomination comprising the Christian Right.

For over two decades, white Southern Baptists have been trying to make inroads with the African American community, particularly the black urban community, not only to increase their dwindling membership but also to promulgate an aggressive anti-gay agenda.

With just months until the November election, the Southern Baptist Convention elected Rev. Fred Luter this past Tuesday as president. This may pave the way to their goal of promoting an anti-gay message.

Rev. Fred Luter, a native son of New Orleans, ran unopposed and was unanimously elected. He is the first African American president of the Southern Baptist Convention (SBC). But Luter's ascendancy to the highest office of the nation's largest Protestant denomination (and the world's largest Baptist denomination) raises the query - is his post a symbol of honorific tokenism? Will he have any real power with a predominately white denomination.

While minorities make-up a new worshipping contingent in a shrinking membership body, it is this group the SBC is wooing. And ministers of color are now the front persons evangelizing for the denomination.

"We cannot expect to reach this do-rag, tattooed, iPod generation with an eight-track ministry. We have to somehow change how we do things," Luter told reporters, expressing shock and utter surprise that his proposed descriptor could be viewed as offensive.

At present, the SBC is approximately 20 percent people of color with about 7 percent African-American, 6 percent Latino, 3 percent Asian, and 4 percent other. African-American congregations have grown by 85 percent, up from 1,907 in 1998 to 3,534 in 2010.

The paltry number of people of color in the SBC is rooted in its once upon a time, unabashedly racist history. Notoriously known to have filled the ranks of the Ku Klux Klan, Southern Baptists have been vociferous defenders of anti-miscegenation laws, Jim Crows edicts, and lynching mob justice, to name a few. The Southern Baptist Convention was founded in 1845 in defense of slavery.

"We lament and repudiate historic acts of evil such as slavery from which we continue to reap a bitter harvest," the Southern Baptist resolution on racial reconciliation stated, acknowledging that some congregations still excluded African Americans but promising to "commit ourselves to eradicate racism in all its forms from Southern Baptist life and ministry."

Sadly, Luter was unaware of the SBC's dark history.

As a huge denomination comprising the Christian Right and its anti-gay agenda, Luter may also be unaware of how the Southern Baptist Convention may actively recruit him, during this election period, to reach African American voters to unseat Obama by exploiting black homophobia.

Since 1995 - when the SBC held a conference on racial reconciliation in Dallas, and it generously donated \$750,000 to rebuild Southern black churches that were recently burned - the once non-existing relationship between the SBC and black churches has now become wedded in an unholy matrimony.

The first sign I saw here in Boston was back in 1998 when an editor called me to solicit my opinion about an African-American minister named Rev. Jackson, who had joined with Ralph Reed's Christian Right movement to funnel \$5 million to \$10 million to Black Churches to help them rejuvenate African American urban communities nationwide; it was called the Samaritan Project.

While the culture of many faith communities and denominations (that were once upon a time helplessly homophobic) are changing, a preponderance of these black churches will not (and sadly to say. they won't in my lifetime).

And it's this homophobic faith tradition from which Obama - in his first presidential run to the White House - unabashedly wooed and won votes.

Although many African American clerics came out in support of Obama's stance on same-sex marriage, so, too, did many decry it.

With right wing organizations like National Organization for Marriage (NOM) courting black churches for their strategic 2012 election game plan to drive a wedge between LGBTQ voters and African American voters, the question is, will Luter fall into their hands - either as the SBC's titular head or simply as a misguided Christian homophobe?

With either reason, Luter would wield enormous influence in pushing a right wing agenda.

While we don't know what Luter will do in his post, there is enough data to predict with certainty how African Americans will vote in this 2012 election as it was predicted in 2008 - irrespective of the President's views on marriage equality or right wing anti-gay agendas.

BlackCommentator.com Editorial Board member and Columnist, the Rev. Irene Monroe, is a religion columnist, theologian, and public speaker. She is the Coordinator of the African-American Roundtable of the Center for Lesbian and Gay Studies in Religion and Ministry (CLGS) at the Pacific School of Religion. A native of Brooklyn, Rev. Monroe is a graduate from Wellesley College and Union Theological Seminary at Columbia University, and served as a pastor at an African-American church before coming to Harvard Divinity School for her doctorate as a Ford Fellow. She was recently named to MSNBC's list of [10 Black Women You Should Know](#). Reverend Monroe is the author of [Let Your Light Shine Like a Rainbow Always: Meditations on Bible Prayers for](#)

[Not'So'Everyday Moments](#). As an African-American feminist theologian, she speaks for a sector of society that is frequently invisible. Her website is irenemonroe.com. Click [here](#) to contact the Rev. Monroe.



Copyright © 2002-2012
www.BlackCommentator.com
All Rights Reserved